

SOLEC 98: Working toward development of Great Lakes indicators

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The third State of the Lakes Ecosystem Conference (SOLEC 98) will be held in Buffalo, New York, October 21-23, 1998. SOLEC participants are decision makers from: governments at all levels, private industry, environmental groups, First Nations/Tribes, health professionals, universities, agriculture etc. SOLEC is a working meeting where these decision makers gather to review draft material prepared for the conference. The input received at SOLEC is incorporated into the State of the Lakes report which the Parties to the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (Canada and the United States) publish about 9 months after SOLEC.

What are we trying to achieve for SOLEC 98 and beyond?

The Parties have an obligation, pursuant to the Articles and Annexes of the Agreement, to report on the state of the Great Lakes and on progress toward the goals of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (GLWQA). The State of the Lakes Ecosystem Conference was created to fulfill this obligation in part.

The first two SOLEC conferences reviewed the state of various components of the Great Lakes ecosystem through the use of indicators and a subjective assessment of "good," "fair," "improving," etc. These indicators were developed through the best judgment of the scientists involved, and some have been widely reported for several years. The Parties want to establish a consistent, easily understood suite of indicators that will objectively represent the state of major ecosystem components across all Great Lakes basins and which can be used to assess achievement of the purpose of the GLWQA. The acceptance and use of a core set of indicators will also drive data collection activities throughout the basin, so that progress under the GLWQA can be reported every two years.

The IJC has a responsibility to evaluate progress toward achieving the goals and objectives of the GLWQA. A set of indicators that is relevant to both the IJC and the Parties will prevent a dilution of monitoring effort for competing purposes, and will foster cooperation between the Parties and the IJC for the common good of the Great Lakes ecosystem. Data will be collected, commonly shared, and be made available on a timely basis. This system of a shared set of indicators will be flexible enough to expand to take into account new emerging issues.

Why is a SOLEC Indicators List important?

The demand for high quality, relevant data concerning the health of various components of the Great Lakes ecosystem has been escalating rapidly for the past decade or so. The U.S. and Canada have spent billions of dollars and uncounted hours attempting to reverse the effects of cultural eutrophication, toxic chemical pollution, over-fishing, habitat destruction, introduced species, etc. Environmental management agencies are being asked to demonstrate that past programs have been successful and that the success of future or continuing programs will be commensurate with the resources expended (financial and personnel time). At the same time, in both countries, the amount of taxpayers dollars being devoted to Great Lakes environment issues is decreasing. The demand for high quality data, while operating with limited resources, is forcing environmental and natural resource agencies to be more selective and more efficient in the collection and analysis of data.

The most efficient data collection efforts will be those that are cost-effective and relevant to multiple users. An understanding by stakeholders about what information is necessary and sufficient to characterize the state of Great Lakes ecosystem health through the use of indicators, and to measure progress toward ecosystem goals, would facilitate efficient monitoring and reporting programs.

Other subjects to be discussed at SOLEC 98

In SOLEC 96, the idea of a Biodiversity Investment Area was first proposed in the Land by the Lakes paper. The idea there was to identify high quality areas in the terrestrial nearshore for protection. In a sense, these areas were at the other end of the spectrum from Areas of Concern. In SOLEC 98 we will be presenting papers on Biodiversity Investment Areas for the terrestrial nearshore, coastal wetlands, and open waters.

SOLEC 98 will also have an update on our gas gauges from SOLEC 94 and 96.

Although the invitation list for SOLEC 98 is limited, inquiries concerning participation may be directed to:

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or by visiting our SOLEC web site

<http://www.epa.gov/glnpo/solec/>